LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODYING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,

AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF

THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My Dear Gorillah:

HERE am I beginning my fifth communication to you, and we have not yet left Egypt, the land of the "Beetle," the cradle of the art in which I am endeavouring, feebly, to interest you. If we dwell as long on the architecture of other countries the tale will not soon come to an end. We have yet to treat of the classic styles of Greece and Rome, all the phases of Mediæval art, its decadence and revival. We may say, invoking the Spirit of Architecture, as one who desires to prove himself a poet writes to me,—

"Gentle maiden, let me trace
All the features of thy face,
In thy simple cottage home,
In thy proud cathedral dome,
In aerial spires whose height
Mocks the keen observer's sight,
Blending as thou bidst them rise
Heavenward with the azure skies.
In thy many towers that stand
Way-marks in our peaceful land,
Towers of every age and birth
That bestud the face of earth;
In stupendous temples found
Upon Egypt's desert ground,
Or in pyramids survey
Thine imperishable sway.
Or with Layard let me trace
Sculptures vast in earth's embrace,
Palaces and halls of stone,
Histories of *states unknown*:
In thy simple Grecian dress,
In thy Roman sumptuousness;
Or when thou wert overwrought
From the deepest mines of thought,
When thy glories were enshrined
In the pensive monkish mind,
And thy beauties understood
Only by the few that would
Seek thee for thy love alone,
Unrewarded and unknown,
Dead to all the world beside,
Thou their glory, light, and guide."

I cannot, however, quit the land of the Pharaohs without a few more particulars, though they shall be brief. The Egyptians did not regard their houses as so important as their tombs. Nevertheless, the latter were sometimes of considerable excellence, and covered a large space. The rooms were arranged around an open area; sometimes the buildings were four or five stories high, although generally low, and they had a portico before the door.

The top of the house in hot countries is, as you know, a valuable place of resort. Constant reference is made to it in the holy writings. On the top of many of the houses in Egypt there was a small chamber at one corner, open at the front, which is peculiar. It is referred to in the proverb, that "It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top than with a brawling woman in a wide house." Fortunately, there are no such things as "brawling women" now,—they know their mission better,—charity, peace, and love. What would the world be without them? Sometimes the house-top had a covering supported on pillars. Their villas were extensive, and were elegantly adorned. The walls and ceilings were richly painted: scrolls and other ornaments, which are common in Greek works, were employed very generally in Egyptian decoration. The extent to which sculpture was employed is shown by this, that Cambyses is said to have taken 2,500 statues from Egypt.

Great progress has been made in deciphering the hieroglyphics on Egyptian monuments, but I need not tell you the steps by which the power has been acquired. The first investigators of Egyptian antiquities made many strange mistakes, as you may suppose. For example, a paper was read at the Society of Antiquaries lately, showing that a tablet at Turin, hitherto supposed to be a plan of the Tomb of Sethos the First, was in truth a map of the gold mines of Ethiopia!

The ancient monuments of Egypt have suffered fearfully from those who needed stone for new constructions; and even at this time the inhabitants are with difficulty prevented from continuing their ravages. Parts of many interesting ruins have been broken up to mend the roads. Some educated investigators have, it is to be regretted, aided in the evil work; there are loud complaints even against M. Lepsius. According to an American writer recently travelling in Egypt (Mr. Bayard Taylor), Lepsius has been splitting pillars to obtain the paintings upon them for the Museum at Berlin. "At one spot," the writer says, "where the latter has totally ruined a fine doorway, some indignant Frenchman has written in red chalk: '*Meurtre commis par Lepsius.*' In all the tombs of Thebes, wherever you see the most flagrant and shameless spoliations, the guide says 'Lepsius.' Who can blame the Arabs for wantonly defacing these precious monuments, when such an example is set them by the vanity of European antiquaries."

Sir G. Wilkinson has recently endeavoured, in a work on "The Architecture of Egypt," to arrange the columns found in the various buildings there in "Orders;" with this, however, whether the monuments justify it or not, I need not trouble you. The Egyptians, as I have already mentioned, used colour very extensively in the decoration of their buildings; in fact, the ingenuity with which they mixed painting, sculpture, and architecture, making them co-operate to one purpose and in one utterance, is especially to be noticed, and might afford us a valuable lesson. Do you not agree with me, that these buildings are "History in Brick and Stone?" They tell of the people who erected them in a manner not to be questioned or falsified. We have here thoughts, creeds, and manners made tangible and clear.

In turning over any illustrations of Egyptian antiquities you will not fail to notice the elegance of many of their vases and ornaments, and you will find the capitals of some of their columns very closely resembling both the "Ionic" and the "Corinthian" capitals of the Greeks, concerning which I shall have to speak presently. The *lotus* flower, typifying the Nile, is, as you know, a constantly recurring ornament on Egyptian buildings. When you next walk through the Egyptian sculpture gallery at the British Museum, notice some of the interesting wall-paintings brought from the tombs and other structures, and there set up, little changed, notwithstanding the time which has elapsed since the limner produced them, and Rhamses looked on. You may notice, too, here many sepulchral tablets which have the characteristics of a temple-front in miniature; the pyramidising outline, the large hollow for a cornice, and the mimic reeds at the angles to which I directed your attention in the fourth letter. In some the hollow is ornamented with upright stripes of red and yellow colour. Near these is the column of which I gave a rough representation (Fig. 12), and if you will compare this with the columns forming the entrance to the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, when you are passing, you will see how difficult it is even to copy new forms correctly before principles are mastered. For example, in the sketch, you will observe where the reeds are imitated in stone as bound together at a short distance from the top, small wedges are inserted in the hollows which the circular faces of the reeds coming together form, *in order to make the binding more secure*: whereas, in the London copy, these wedges are made to take the shape of an ornament occurring indifferently in the spaces and *over the face of each reed*. Thus it is that by mere imitation, the spirit, truth, and completeness of a real architecture are lost, and a medley of sham, lifeless, and unmeaning forms is substituted.

As we are at the Egyptian Hall it would be unjust if I did not refer to the charming diorama of "The Nile," painted from Mr. Bonomi's sketches by Mr. Henry Warren, who has dipped his pencil into eastern light, and Mr. Fahey, which was recently exhibited there, and gave all who saw it so clear a notion of the aspect of the country, the character of the buildings, and the genius of Egyptian art. I would fain hope that this work may not have the usual fate of such productions, but be preserved for use in some educational institution.

Let us now look at another country. In MEXICO, probably at a remote, certainly at unknown date, buildings were erected of an extraordinary size and character, so closely approximating in some respects to many Egyptian structures as to induce some writers to attribute them to a common or at all events connected origin. The pyramidal forms prevail universally. One of the pyramids, namely that of Cholula, is nearly twice as large at the base as the largest of the Egyptian pyramids (1,440 feet,) though the height, however, is considerably less (177 feet); and the outline is not that of a continuous pyramid, but consists of eight stories or steps, similar to the Temple of Belus. Each of these stories inclines slightly, so that the structure consists in fact of eight truncated pyramids standing one upon the other. One of the Egyptian pyramids, as I have already said, is formed in the same manner. At Teotihuacan there are hundreds of pyramids both in steps and of continuous outline. They agree curiously with the Egyptian pyramids in this particular, that the sides face the cardinal points of the compass, and the triangular arch, if it may be so termed, found in the Egyptian pyramids and in the early structures of other nations, occurs constantly. Some of the temples were of enormous size, and exhibit remains which defy

* No. V. See pp. 100, 134, 160, and 196.

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